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ABSTRACT

An educational questionnaire was designed and administered to students at Essex County College. The questionnaire was divided into three areas: educational, vocational, and psychosocial. A total of 134 students returned the questionnaire. Their answers showed the areas in which they needed pre-entrance counseling to be in the following order of priority: (1) preparing term and research papers, (2) help in math skills and concepts, (3) guidance in obtaining financial-aid information, (4) help in selection of schools and vocations after high school, (5) help in preparing a bibliography, and (6) selection of courses appropriate for them. (Author/DB)

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AN ANALYSIS OF AN EDUCATIONAL QUESTIONNAIRE PREPARED TO DISCOVER IN WHAT AREAS ESSEX COUNTY COLLEGE STUDENTS NEEDED COUNSELLING BEFORE ENTERING COLLEGE

By

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Essex County College

A PRACTICUM SUBMITTED TO NOVA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULLFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this practicum report is to gain information about Essex County College students through using a questionnaire. Information needs to be learned about those areas in which students believe that they needed counseling before entering college in order to be more realistic, better able to handle the rigors of the community college environment, and better able to understand their own motivations and goals.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

As a teacher at Essex County College this researcher (henceforth referred to as R) has watched students come and go for over five years. Some have succeeded and survived the intensive requirements that a school like ECC demands of a student. ECC is a school that is composed of a very high percentage of minority group members (about 90% black and Puerto Rican.) Because of the high percent from minority groups and because these specific minorities have a rather large percent of "low achieving members," R has watched only about 20% of the students who entered ECC's open doors graduate. In other words, nearly 80% of the students seemingly fail to complete their education at ECC. It is usual for a teacher to find by the end of the semester that about 30% of his class will receive grades of D, F, or Incomplete.

This problem is not only isolated to Essex County College. Roueche

(1972. p. 6) is quoted as saying, "Most thoughtful writers in the community college field expressed concern over the fate of increasing numbers of nontraditional students who enter through the open door. The open door is sometimes cynically referred to as the revolving door. One thing is certain--few of the students stay long."

Medsker (1960,p. 91) shows that in a sample of 63 public community colleges only 35% of the students graduated. The failure rates at our community colleges are pathetic. If Ford Motor Company only got 35% of its cars to run, in other words 65% of its products were a waste of time and simply scrap, Ford would be out of business in a short time. If one could make an analogy between the community colleges and a big business, what implications does this have for the community colleges?

Some critics say that just because a student fails to graduate, this does not mean that his education is a complete waste. Some students improve their reading and math skills dramatically even though they have not arisen to the school's criteria. Some students transfer and eventually graduate from four year colleges. R however, believes that the average community college student's experience is a failure because the student is not counselled and helped to find areas of study in which he could find success (e.g. a vocational program or technical school.) An F on a student's transcript is always an F no matter how one looks at it, and a community college gives out many F's in a

semester.

It appears that the community colleges should stop fooling themselves and start looking squarely at the attrition rates, and they should start looking at them soon. Community colleges are getting a bad name with the community and with the students that fail. Roueche (1968, p. 2) agrees with this when he says, "Critics of the open door, however, have expressed concern over what actually happens to the low-achieving student. Attrition rates in community junior colleges are alarming. Research findings indicate that as many as 75 percent of low-achieving students withdraw from college the first year. Yet, it has been maintained that to admit high school graduates without regard to the quality or depth of their preparation is bound to lead to higher attrition rates - the open door may be simply a license to fail. It is precisely this problem that has led critics to refer cynically to the open door as the 'revolving door.' The attrition rate may well be one of the most pressing problems of the community junior college."

Why Students Fail

Another study also attests to the high failure rate and the unrealistic aspirations of many community college students when it says, "One problem does appear to be important - the high proportion of students who claim they want to transfer to four-year college. About two-thirds of the students in our sample said they definitely planned to transfer to a four-year college. It is possible that most of these students were

accurately reporting their aspirations, since they could have chosen another alternative, 'plan to transfer if my grades allow.' However, only about one third of the students planning to transfer had been accepted by a college."(The Two Year College and Its Students, 1969, p. 68.)

It would seem from examining the above reports and studies that something is really amiss in the community college. It is possible that the student that fails may go away with something positive from his experience, but R believes that many have just added one more failure to their long list of failures, and certainly, lack of success at the community college has not helped their self esteem.

One study relates the reasons that 10,000 students in 20 community colleges withdraw from college. Medsker (1960, p.48) shows that 44% of the withdrawing students claim that they left school either because they had "full time employment or for "personal or health reasons." These are the reasons the student gives, but are they the real reasons? Often the real reasons lie behind the general statements that the student gives on a questionnaire.

Perhaps Monroe (1972, p. 209) comes closer to pinpointing the reasons why students really drop out of school when he says, "Many factors account for large drop out rates. Two factors, sex and age, have little significance. The significant factors are academic ability, degree of motivation, and financial ability. But lack of scholastic aptitude has always been regarded by educators as the prime cause

of college withdrawals." However Monroe continues to say that many dropouts have the ability to do college work when he cites a study that "found that 50% of the dropouts were capable of succeeding in college so far as ability and grades were concerned." (Monroe, 1972, p. 210)

After examining dozens of books by the leading authorities in the field of community colleges and trying to get some idea of what the real reasons for college failure are, R divided the reasons into two categories: 1) the student and 2) the community college and its basic assumptions.

1. The Student

R believes part of the blame for student failure is of course on the student. Many explanations can be offered but lack of ability and lack of motivation seem to be the two biggest culprets. Clearly lack of ability is a complacated topic and often with factors beyond the student's control. A certain amount of ability, however, is also something the student may elect to achieve. On the other hand, no one can force a student to develop abilities that he is not motivated to develop. If a student is not strongly motivated to learn math, all of the best math programs in the world can not make him learn math.

Other factors such as emotional problems and financial problems also emerge, but not enough work has been done to tell what influence they have on student success or failure. These factors need much

more study.

Another factor seems to emerge and that is the lack of realism that a student may have about the demands of college and about his own goals. I believe that much of this lack of realism is due to the failure of the community college and secondary schools to counsel the student and help him before he enters a program.

2. The Community College

R believes that one function that has not been stressed enough in the community college is counselling. The community college teachers and counselors must learn new methods of reaching the student that is floundering and help that student to assess his goals and abilities so that failure will not overwhelm him. Koos (1970, p. 226) states, "Although the findings of the studies are hardly in full agreement and disclose varying degrees of realism, it is found that youth who have had experience in programs of counseling indicate realistic preferences in larger proportions."

More books can be mentioned here that chastize the average community college professor with failure to make the college courses palpable, interesting and the objectives clear to the student. Blocker et.al. say that college teachers and administrators have their sights and orientation aimed too much toward their big brothers in the four year college. "The academic division of the two-year college needs

considerable less emphasis than it is currently receiving." (Blocker et.al.,1965,p. 209.) A large variety of the community college authorities explain that the community college must place more emphasis on "terminal education" or vocational education.

R believes that the student's community college experience need not be a failure for any student. With individualized programmed instruction, Johnson explains that students needn't fail if "the student proceeds on an individual basis at his own rate - faster students romping through an instructional sequence very rapidly, slower students being tutored as slowly as necessary, with indefinite patience to meet their needs." (Johnson 1969, p. 73.)

Considering the above factors R posed the question of how he could identify more closely the problems Essex County College students encounter when they enter the open doors, and in what areas they may need counselling.

PROCEDURES

In order to discover the areas that ECC students needed counselling, R composed a questionnaire using a likert type scale (see figure 1 for the questionnaire.) This questionnaire asked the student to mark areas in which he could have used help before entering college so that he could have been more realistic and more effective upon entering college. The areas that were explored in the questionnaire fit generally

into three categories.

1. Educational information (questions 1 to 9)

I believe I need counselling in ..."preparing term or research papers," "studying for exam," etc.

2. Psycho-social information (questions 10 to 15)

"helping me with my personal problems and social adjustments," "helping me cope with failure," etc.

3. Vocational information (questions 16 to 19)

"selection of goals for when I leave school," etc.

There was also included an open ended question where students could respond freely and write in other areas where they believed they needed counselling.

In his researching through the ERIC files and journals, R could find no questionnaires that were in any way similar to the ones he constructed. Two questionnaires were actually made and processed. On the first trial 250 questionnaires were processed before R realized that the students did not understand the directions. He had to rewrite the directions in the questionnaire more clearly and resubmit it to more students. After discussing this questionnaire format with a sample of students and examining the responses, R found that the new form of the questionnaire was understood and correctly answered.

FIGURE 1 - STUDENT EDUCATIONAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Your present age _____ Sex _____

Did you get a high school or equivalency diploma? _____

What year did you get your diploma? _____

DIRECTIONS: Please circle the number which you believe best defines your needs before entering college.

1 refers to NEEDING THE LEAST HELP in that area.

2 refers to NEEDING SOME HELP in that area.

3 refers to NEEDING THE MOST HELP in that area.

BEFORE ENTERING COLLEGE, I BELIEVE I NEEDED HELP IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

	Least	Some	Most
1. notetaking	1	2	3
2. preparing term or research papers.....	1	2	3
3. preparing a bibliography...	1	2	3
4. studying for an exam.....	1	2	3
5. reading skills.....	1	2	3
6. math skills and concepts...	1	2	3
7. organizing and budgeting time in order to meet school deadlines.....	1	2	3
8. obtaining financial aid.....	1	2	3
9. gaining the proper information regarding admissions exams and applications.....	1	2	3

	Least	Some	Most
10. improving my motivation	1	2	3
11. helping me with my personal problems and social adjustments	1	2	3
12. helping me with my social interactions with peers	1	2	3
13. helping me to get along with teachers and meeting his expectations and demands	1	2	3
14. helping me cope with failure.....	1	2	3
15. awareness of extra curricular activities	1	2	3
16. selection of courses appropriate for me.....	1	2	3
17. identifying my interest areas	1	2	3
18. selection of goals for when I leave this school	1	2	3
19. selection of schools, vocations and other opportunities after I left high school.....	1	2	3

20. Are there any other areas in which you believe you were ill prepared to cope upon entering college? Please name and comment on them.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERIOUS COOPERATION.

RESULTS

The results of the questionnaire are compiled on tables 1,2, and 3. Table 1 contains the results for the 134 students who answered the questionnaire. The area that the students responded to needing the most (55% responded "most") help was in preparing term or research papers. In discussing this result with teachers at ECC, it seems that the students' estimation is accurate. The students at ECC are on the average very poor at writing and researching papers. Likewise, most open door colleges are finding the same problem. At a local similar program at Rutgers University, Newark, the reading teachers are wondering how to become 'writing' teachers. Nationally this problem has also been recognized. Recently Princeton Testing Service has changed the format of its Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SATs) to include a writing sample for college bound students taking the test.

The second highest category receiving "most" (47%) was question number 6 which refers to needing help in math skills and concepts. After discussing this with math teachers at the school, R found this to be a major area in which the students also did need help. The area that ranked third was question number 8 concerned with obtaining financial aid. Since the students at ECC are mainly from minority backgrounds and generally from poor urban environments it is understandable that finances would rank high on their list of concerns.

The fourth ranking area (33% of the students circling "most")

was concerned with needing help in the selection of schools, vocations, and other opportunities after the student left high school. Certainly this is an area in which everyone needs much counselling and an area that ECC tends to overlook. The fifth highest percentage is concerned with preparing a bibliography (question number 3). Again this coincides with the first ranked question on preparing a term or research paper.

It is also interesting to note that the sixth highest percentage in the table for the students responding "most" (31%) was in the area of obtaining help in the selection of courses approriate for them (question number 16). Likewise, this coincided with the vocational decision making dilemma.

The area in table 1 where the student believed he needed the "least" amount of academic help was in notetaking (question number 1). The student also believed he needed little help in solving his personal problems (question number 10), in getting along with peers (question number 12), and in getting along with teachers and meeting their expectations and demands (question number 13).

There were very few free responses to question 20. After examining the responses that were given, R decided that none of them were helpful to this study. Therefore, R concluded that the areas that the students needed some of the most counselling are in preparing research papers, improving math skills, obtaining financial aid, and in selecting appropriate schools and vocations.

In analyzing the data further, R compared the male responses (table 2) with the female responses (table 3). Responses given by males and females were generally similar. More women listed that they believed that they needed more help in improving thier math and by comparison, the males listed that they needed more help in improving their motivation (question number 10) and that they needed more counselling in their selection of schools and vocations. These differences were not great.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Even though the sample of students was too small to be conclusive, R found the data interesting and helpful. The members of the counselling department at Essex County College will receive a copy of this report as R believes that they will also find it beneficial.

R has further plans to enlarge upon this study and use the information as part of his superpracticum, in which he will set up a program to help counsel high school students. At this point it is clear that R will have to set up these counselling workshops to concentrate much of the time in helping the student learn how to prepare research papers, developing his math skills, learning how to gain financial aid in college, and helping the student to think in terms of realistic school selecting, and future vocational goals. R believes that this study will prove to help

the student (especially the low achieving student) be more realistic about his future and about the problems he will encounter when he comes to college if he chooses to do so.

Table 1 - Student Responses

Number and percentage of both male and female student responses to questions 1 to 19 of questionnaire in Figure 1.

NUMBER = 134
MEDIAN AGE = 26 years
MEDIAN YEAR RECEIVED HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA = 1969
(9 received no high school or equivalency diploma)

Question	Least	Some	Most	Total R's
1.	(59) 46%	(48) 38%	(21) 16%	128
2.	(8) 6%	(53) 39%	(74) 55%	135
3.	(30) 23%	(61) 46%	(42) 32%	133
4.	(46) 35%	(55) 42%	(30) 23%	131
5.	(46) 36%	(55) 43%	(28) 22%	129
6.	(19) 15%	(49) 38%	(60) 47%	128
7.	(42) 34%	(57) 46%	(24) 20%	123
8.	(33) 25%	(43) 33%	(55) 42%	131
9.	(39) 30%	(55) 43%	(35) 27%	129
10.	(47) 37%	(64) 50%	(18) 14%	129
11.	(70) 55%	(39) 30%	(19) 15%	128
12.	(79) 61%	(39) 30%	(11) 9%	129
13.	(77) 61%	(36) 28%	(14) 11%	127
14.	(65) 51%	(46) 36%	(17) 13%	128
15.	(46) 37%	(67) 52%	(13) 10%	126
16.	(24) 18%	(66) 50%	(41) 31%	131
17.	(52) 41%	(45) 35%	(31) 24%	128
18.	(43) 33%	(52) 40%	(34) 26%	129
19.	(34) 27%	(50) 40%	(41) 33%	125

Table 2 - Male Responses

Number and percentage of male student responses to questionnaire found in Figure 1.

NUMBER = 36
MEDIAN AGE = 26
MEDIAN YEAR AWARDED HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA = 1967
(3 received no high school or equivalency diploma)

Question	Least	Some	Most	Total R's
1.	(16) 46%	(15) 43%	(4) 11%	35
2.	(03) 8%	(12) 35%	(21) 57%	36
3.	(9) 26%	(17) 49%	(9) 26%	35
4.	(13) 36%	(14) 39%	(9) 25%	36
5.	(13) 39%	(15) 44%	(6) 18%	34
6.	(6) 17%	(17) 47%	(13) 36%	36
7.	(9) 27%	(15) 45%	(9) 27%	33
8.	(9) 25%	(12) 33%	(15) 42%	36
9.	(13) 37%	(13) 37%	(9) 26%	35
10.	(9) 26%	(18) 51%	(8) 23%	35
11.	(15) 44%	(14) 41%	(5) 15%	34
12.	(19) 54%	(10) 29%	(6) 17%	35
13.	(19) 58%	(9) 27%	(5) 15%	33
14.	(16) 46%	(14) 40%	(5) 14%	35
15.	(18) 54%	(14) 42%	(1) 3%	33
16.	(9) 26%	(16) 46%	(10) 29%	35
17.	(14) 40%	(15) 43%	(6) 17%	35
18.	(9) 26%	(17) 49%	(9) 26%	35
19.	(7) 21%	(13) 39%	(14) 41%	34

Table 3 - Female Responses

Number and percentage of female student responses to questionnaire found in Figure 1.

NUMBER = 98
MEDIAN AGE = 26
MEDIAN YEAR AWARDED HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA = 1971
(6 received no high school diploma or equivalency diploma)

Question	Least	Some	Most	Total R's
1.	(43) 46%	(33) 36%	(17) 18%	93
2.	(5) 5%	(40) 41%	(53) 54%	98
3.	(21) 22%	(44) 45%	(33) 33%	98
4.	(33) 35%	(41) 43%	(21) 22%	95
5.	(33) 35%	(40) 42%	(22) 23%	95
6.	(13) 14%	(32) 34%	(47) 52%	92
7.	(33) 37%	(42) 47%	(15) 16%	90
8.	(24) 25%	(31) 33%	(40) 42%	95
9.	(26) 27%	(42) 45%	(26) 28%	94
10.	(38) 39%	(46) 49%	(10) 12%	94
11.	(55) 59%	(25) 27%	(14) 14%	94
12.	(60) 64%	(29) 30%	(5) 6%	94
13.	(58) 62%	(27) 29%	(9) 9%	94
14.	(49) 53%	(32) 34%	(12) 13%	93
15.	(28) 29%	(53) 58%	(12) 13%	93
16.	(15) 16%	(50) 52%	(31) 32%	96
17.	(38) 41%	(30) 32%	(25) 27%	93
18.	(34) 36%	(35) 37%	(25) 27%	94
19.	(27) 30%	(37) 40%	(27) 30%	91

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